



## UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION 5  
77 WEST JACKSON BOULEVARD  
CHICAGO, IL 60604-3590

FEB 12 2003

REPLY TO THE ATTENTION OF:  
WU-16J

Chairman Elmer J. Emery  
St. Croix Tribal Council  
P.O. Box 45287  
Hertel, Wisconsin 54845

Dear Chairman Emery:

The purpose of this letter is to formally recognize the St. Croix Band of Chippewa Indians for their progressive ground water protection efforts. Specifically, the St. Croix Tribal Environmental Services sought and obtained funding and then developed a program to plug abandoned drinking water wells on tribal lands. These efforts can enable you to protect your underground sources of drinking water from contamination by these abandoned wells now and in the future.

Private household and other drinking water wells whose use has been permanently discontinued can pose a health risk to persons who use nearby drinking water wells. These abandoned wells can become a direct pipeline for contaminants at the surface to reach underground drinking water sources, if the wells are only temporarily sealed, or are improperly plugged. Surface runoff containing fertilizers or animal wastes, flood waters, or even small spills can cause significant contamination of ground water if it drains into an abandoned well. There is also the potential for underground discharges from septic systems to flow through abandoned wells into deeper drinking water sources. Abandoned wells can also pose a safety hazard to children and pets.

The St. Croix Tribal Environmental Services received a grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in 1997, to purchase supplies and plug abandoned wells. Some abandoned wells were then later plugged with the assistance of a representative for EPA's Underground Injection Control Branch, Dean Johnson. In 2001, another NRCS grant enabled the Band to purchase tools and additional supplies, hire technicians, and plug more wells. With Mr. Johnson's training and assistance, a Tribal Well Closure Program was developed by the Band, and a total of fourteen abandoned drinking water wells have been properly plugged, to date. We specifically wish to acknowledge Water Quality Specialists Steve Jenson and Jason Weaver, and Technician Chad Songetay, under the leadership of Director Martin Shutt, who accomplished this significant ground water protection effort.

We applaud the St. Croix Band of Chippewa Indians for taking the initiative to develop the first tribal well closure program in EPA's Region 5. Congratulations on this special effort to protect human health by safeguarding underground drinking water sources from contamination by abandoned wells.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jo Lynn Traub". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Jo" is written with a large, looped capital "J". The last name "Traub" is written with a capital "T" and a stylized "B" that loops back. The signature is centered horizontally within the block.

Jo Lynn Traub  
Director, Water Division

cc: Martin Shutt